

1983

Kate and John

Charles Casey Martin

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Kate and John · *Charles Casey Martin*

He saw the card- and domino-spots.
She heard the bid-calls.
Together they made a respectable player
at Hearts and at Moon and at Forty-two.
After nightlong games
and John's loud stories
of a Texas without TV
—or me—
I'd be kept from sleep under Kate's quilts,
sweaty from imagining a world
what if
I'd never been born into?
On their last Christmas together,
their kids,
grand-
and great grand-
kids chipped in a dollar each
and bought them color TV.
She
—who was almost blind from years of quilting—
wanted him to go on and on
about what she couldn't see.
He
—who was hard, or tired, of hearing—
would trust her to whisper
what the pictures said into his ear.

Together, they almost always got the whole thing wrong.

Except for one ten o'clock
when I sat between them on their sofa quilt
and heard and saw
their reconstruction of a news story:
a tankcar
unloading hydrogen at a sidestation
erupted in slow motion and burned.
Whoever was filming from a hillside didn't survive.

But the camera kept reporting
—green sky green sky green—
somersaulting silently down the grass slope,
focusing, finally, on a cloud.
“Filmcrew” and “implosion” and “microphone”
sounded odd from Kate’s mouth
and odder applied
to the oranges and bright blues shared by John.
But the one whose job and world
had gone on alone
could’ve been described simply
with a small, sad word that
—brushing each a shoulder to one of mine—
John kept from Kate and Kate from John.